

"Rethinking Life: Give Birth to a Better World"  
Romans 8:18-26

In his book *Rethinking Life*, Shane Claiborne makes a list of some of the atrocities that have happened in the last couple of hundred years. He notes that these were just the fourteen largest massacres, listing the casualty numbers only being for civilians with a total that exceeds 107 million.

- Mao Zedong (China and Tibet, 1949-69): 49-78 million
- Joseph Stalin (USSR, 1932-39): 23 million
- Adolf Hitler (Nazi Germany, 1939-45): 12 million
- Leopold II (Belgin Congo, 1886-1908): 8 million
- Hideki Tojo (Japan, 1941-44): 5 million
- Ismail Enver (Turkey, 1915-20): 2.5 million
- Pol Pot (Cambodia, 1975-79): 1.7 million
- Kim Il-Sung (North Korea, 1948-94): 1.6 million
- Mengistu (Ethiopia, 1975-78): 1.5 million
- Leonid Berzhnev (Afghanistan, 1979-82): 800,000
- Jean Kambanda (Rwanda, 1994): 800,000
- Suharto (East Timor/West Papua, 1966-98): 800,000
- Saddam Hussein (Iraq, Iran, and Kurdistan, 1980-90): 600,000
- Tito (Yugoslavia, 1945-87): 570,000

One could look at these atrocities and many others like them which are happening today as we speak and conclude that our world is falling apart, which may lead us into despair. But today I would like to invite us to another view which comes from a deep place of faith. Instead of looking at the world as dying, we are invited to see the world as being reborn into something completely new. A few years ago, I read a powerful little book by Margaret Silf called, *The Other Side of Chaos*, where she invites her readers to see the chaos of life as the grounds for new opportunities and transformation where God's purpose is not to restore, rehabilitate or return us to a former state, but to re-create. Here is a short interview with Silf about trusting God when life is breaking down: <https://youtu.be/WHtgfgYncY/>.

In this interview, Margaret Silf explains that her book explores the idea that chaos, while unsettling, can be productive and creative. She connects this to the Genesis story, modern physics' chaos theory, and the Paschal mystery, suggesting that within breakdown, a "strange attractor" (equated to the Holy Spirit) brings forth new order. Her core message is about trusting that a divine mystery is at work in the midst of breakdown, and that God's "divine instinct" is to hatch something new from the chaos, rather than simply fix what was broken.

When we see life and chaos in this way, that the world is pregnant with new possibilities, our role in the world shifts from people who try to salvage the pieces of the old world, to people who are willing to live with uncertainty, pain, and challenge to help in the birthing process of a new world. We could see ourselves as midwives.

This image of birth and rebirth is present in several scriptures including the one for us for today from Romans 8. There were divisions in the church and a lot of prejudice against the Jewish followers of Jesus. The Gentile followers had taken over the leadership of the church when the Roman emperor expelled the Jews out of Rome. When the Jews were allowed back in Rome, they treated them as inferior by their Gentile brothers and sisters. Many of the Gentile Christians believed that they had replaced the Jewish people in terms of their covenant relationship with God. They thought that the coming of Christ had replaced all the events of the past from Torah to covenant. Jesus, in their view, had replaced the teachings of Moses and the prophets. What was especially sad about this kind of theology was its clear prejudice against the Jews which was so closely aligned with the mentality of the Roman Empire. The Jews were seen as a threat in Rome because they refused to worship the emperor. They also refused the imperial cult mentality of declaring the emperor as the son of God and the savior of the world. They saw that kind of theology as a justification for the Roman systems of dominations and oppression. The Roman emperors had promoted an imperial theology that proclaimed divine approval and affirmation of their social and political structures. That is why Paul was reminding the Romans that their ultimate allegiance should be to God's love in the world and not to any political.

But Paul knew that the root causes of conflict and prejudice could not be dealt only with information or laws. In order to be liberated from the ways of the empire, the ways of domination, fear and violence, Paul emphasized the importance of life in the Spirit. The vision of the Kingdom of God was that of people working together instead of dominating each other. In his book *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, Gordon Fee has argued, "For Paul the Spirit, as an experienced and living reality, was the absolutely crucial matter for Christian life, beginning to end." Fee's thesis builds on what others have noticed previously: "Paul's doctrine of the Spirit is far more central and characteristic than his doctrine of justification by faith." Paul said that knowing the Law intellectually was not enough. Knowing intellectually that systems of greed, domination and violence are not God's will for humanity is not enough to change the way we live and act. One has to experience the power of the Spirit firsthand in order to be transformed. The experience of the Spirit is manifested when one acts as a child of God. When we are led by our inner experience of the Spirit is when we recognize that we are children of God. Of course Paul knew this firsthand through his experience of the Spirit on the road to Damascus.

Let's listen to the scripture for today from Romans 8:18-26 18

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, 20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, 23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of

our bodies. 24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words.

Paul knew the hardships and chaos of the world because he himself was an agent of chaos, but when he had a powerful experience of the Spirit of God on the way to Damascus, he became a midwife for the Spirit and helped so many others experience the same power.

The passage from Romans 8 speaks directly to this idea of a groaning creation, longing for liberation and the revealing of God's children. Just as a woman in labor groans with pain, knowing that new life is on the horizon, so too does creation groan. And we, who have the "first fruits of the Spirit," also groan inwardly, waiting for the full redemption of our bodies and the world. This groaning is not a sign of despair, but of hope – a hope for what we do not yet see, but for which we wait with patience. The Spirit, Paul tells us, helps us in our weakness, interceding for us with groans too deep for words. This is the Spirit at work, guiding us through the labor pains of a world in transition, helping us to be the midwives of a new creation.

I invite you this week to allow the Holy Spirit to redeem your perspective on the chaos of the world so that you may be able to claim your part in the work of the rebirth of our world. Let us embrace the uncertainty, the pain, and the challenge, knowing that God is not restoring the old, but recreating something entirely new. Let us be present to the groaning, both within ourselves and in the world around us, and trust that the Spirit is interceding, bringing forth a better world.

We will end with a book by Kobi Yamada called *Why Not?* A story about discovering our bright possibilities: <https://youtu.be/ANmBBcnJbFc>. This inspirational narrative encourages us to embrace life's possibilities, discover our potential, and make the most of every moment. It prompts self-reflection, encourages resilience in the face of fear, highlights the importance of gratitude and connection, and ultimately suggests that we leave the world a little better than we found it. This is precisely the call of the Spirit: to be active participants in the ongoing creation, to birth a better world by living into our divine potential and making a positive impact. Amen.